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PRESS RELEASE

ASHGABAT, November 17, 2008—Supported by funding from the American people, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), in partnership with the Turkmen National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR), today commenced a two-day roundtable with Turkmen Government officials and leading civil society organizations on the ways to improve Turkmen legislation related to NGOs.

At the opening of the roundtable, the Director of the IDHR, Shirin Ahmedova, said, "This roundtable is a critical step towards achieving the goals of the fundamental reforms and changes initiated by President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, to improve the legislation of Turkmenistan and bring it into compliance with international standards. Improving the laws on public associations and other noncommercial organizations will help to further the democratic process and development of civil society in Turkmenistan."

The roundtable is attended by over 50 participants: officials from the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under President of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Justice, the Institute of State and Law under the President of Turkmenistan, the Institute of International Affairs under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Parliament (the Mejlis), the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan, the Bar of Advocates of Ashgabat city, Magtumguly Turkmenistan State University, the Trade Union Council of Turkmenistan, Gurbansoltan Eje Union of Women of Turkmenistan, Magtymguly Union of Youth of Turkmenistan, and the Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs.

ICNL, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has brought a team of experts from the United States and neighboring countries in the region to guide the discussion on specific, practical measures to involve NGOs into helping the Government achieve its social objectives and improve life for the Turkmen people. "Human beings are social creatures," said Elizabeth Warner, ICNL's Program Director for Central Asia. "By working together with NGOs, the Government can leverage its efforts and achieve greater stability and progress in all areas."

This roundtable is the continuation of ICNL's groundbreaking seminar for Turkmen Government officials in April 2008. That seminar also reviewed how other countries in the region regulate the financing, registration, and operations of NGOs seeking to address important social issues.

This ICNL roundtable is one of the many projects made possible by support from the American people through USAID in Turkmenistan over the past 15 years. USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) is one of the leading donors in the country. With funding from the American people, USAID supports community initiatives, development of agriculture, health care, and broader economic development in Turkmenistan.

ICNL has been implementing USAID-funded programs that strengthen and support social services and NGOs in Central Asia for over 10 years. ICNL is a US-based legal research organization providing technical assistance and analysis to leaders in over 80 countries worldwide.